



The Evolution of Communication

By Marc D. Hauser

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The current wave of research activity on the evolution of cognition is rooted, both historically and intellectually, in the question of how human language evolved. But scientific progress on this question has been stalled in a debate about whether the question can even be broached. Breaking this deadlock, "The Evolution of Communication" addresses the problems of how communication systems, including language, have been designed over the course of evolution. "The Evolution of Communication" looks at species in their natural environments as a way to begin to understand what the real units of analysis of communicating systems are, using arguments about design and function to illuminate both the origin and subsequent evolution of each system. The book is broadly integrative, synthesizing conceptual issues and empirical results from neurobiology, cognitive and developmental psychology, linguistics, evolutionary biology, ethology, and anthropology. It covers a diverse group of organisms, including insects, frogs, birds, bats, monkeys and humans, dissecting the unique design features of each species' communication system. Hauser places comparative communication into the structure of Tinbergen's four causal questions (with some modification) in an examination of communication and neurobiological design, ontogenetic design, adaptive design and psychological design. For each major topic he works through a small set of cases that elegantly and comprehensively illustrate a particular process. The empirical work is restricted to natural communicating systems that use auditory, visual or audiovisual signals.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Few writers have so far even attempted a general overview of animal communication, so Marc Hauser's book is timely if not overdue. Hauser brings to the task a formidable knowledge of the field (his bibliography contains some 1,500 items) plus a lucid style and an infectious enthusiasm that carry one smoothly through an immense maze of information and make complex biological theories accessible even to the uninitiated. For anyone concerned with the comparative study of communication, this book is likely to remain an indispensable source for some time to come." **Derek Bickerton**, *Nature*

About the Author

Marc D. Hauser is Professor of Psychology and Codirector of the Mind, Brain, and Behavior Program at Harvard University.

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